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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KTIP](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [ELAB](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: (C/NF) ARGENTINA: INTELLIGENCE CHIEF IN SANTA CRUZ  
LINKED TO TIP RING

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 0563 (B) BUENOS AIRES 0300

Classified By: Classified By: Charge d' Affaires Tom Kelly for reasons  
1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Local press recently linked Wilfredo Roque, the chief of the Santa Cruz provincial office of Argentina's intelligence agency, SIDE, to a trafficking in persons (TIP) ring led by Alejandro Guerrero and his wife "Yani." A local TV show aired footage showing Roque's right hand man, Oscar Mazzochi, together with Guerrero, while the latter recruited women and children in shantytowns of the federal city to work in the red-light district of Rio Gallegos, the capital of Santa Cruz, the home province of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and her husband, former president Nestor Kirchner. Once the allegations surfaced, Santa Cruz Governor Daniel Peralta ordered an administrative investigation into Mazzochi's alleged involvement in trafficking activities. Mazzochi and two other provincial police officers have been arrested so far, and the Governor has promised he will investigate any law enforcement officials connected with these illegal activities.

¶2. (SBU) Meanwhile, federal Judge Ana Alvarez directed border patrol agents to raid 29 brothels operating in a Rio Gallegos red-light district and ordered them closed. The judicial order came after local press publicized the anti-trafficking NGO La Alameda's undercover investigation and subsequent judicial complaint denouncing drug and human trafficking activity in the area known as "Las Casitas", or "The Little Houses" (ref A). Although the Ministry of Justice's anti-TIP coordinator told poloff that no trafficking victims were found, La Alameda maintains that local police who are allegedly providing protection to the brothels were tipped off about the raid, giving them plenty of time to warn brothel owners. La Alameda also claims that the provincial government did not offer comprehensive assistance to potential trafficking victims, making it difficult for them to denounce those that exploit them. For now, the brothels remain closed, although Governor Peralta and other provincial officials claim that these establishments simply enable individual prostitutes to offer commercial sex voluntarily. END SUMMARY.

Press Links Provincial Intelligence Chief to TIP  
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¶3. (SBU) On June 6, independent newspaper "Perfil" linked Wilfredo Roque, the chief of the Santa Cruz provincial office of Argentina's intelligence agency, SIDE, to a trafficking in persons (TIP) ring led by Alejandro Guerrero. Investigative journalism TV show "American Documentary" ("Documentos America") aired footage showing Roque's right hand man, Oscar Mazzochi, together with Guerrero, recruiting women and children in the shantytowns of Buenos Aires City to work in the red-light district in Rio Gallegos, the capital city of

Santa Cruz, which also happens to be the home province of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and her husband, ex-president Nestor Kirchner. They are known as "Las Casitas" or "The Little Houses." The Catholic Church and other civil society groups claim they are brothels and drug havens operating under the guise of discos and pubs. "Perfil" claims Mazzochi currently works with Roque, and that Guerrero has worked closely with Roque in the past.

14. (C/NF) A childhood friend of former President Nestor Kirchner, Roque was Kirchner's police chief when Kirchner was Santa Cruz Governor. He held this position for 16 years until he was forced to resign in 2007, after then National Deputy Daniel Varizat, a Kirchner ally, ran over six persons in an attempt to escape a teacher's strike in the province. Local newspapers report that during Roque's tenure, he implemented a hiring and promotion freeze for over 12 years, which prompted provincial police officials to supplement their incomes by offering protection to illegal gambling establishments and brothels. According to "Perfil" Roque's right-hand man, Oscar Mazzochi, worked as a non-commissioned police officer in the Special Laws Unit, an office tasked with monitoring the activities of the brothels in Rio Gallegos. Mazzochi has frequently been linked to corruption cases and has been accused of offering police protection to "Las Casitas." "Perfil" quoted an unnamed police source, who said that Mazzochi had long cooperated with TIP ringleader Guerrero and that then Police Chief Roque had always endorsed Mazzochi's activities. When Mazzochi retired in 2004, he moved to Buenos Aires City where he reportedly served as a liaison between Roque and Guerrero to traffic women and children from the shantytowns of Buenos Aires City to Santa Cruz province where they would be forced into prostitution.

15. (SBU) "Perfil" further claims that Roque's association with Guerrero goes back to at least 1998, when Guerrero and his former wife, "Yani," were accused of facilitating prostitution. They reportedly enticed women and girls from northern Argentina with false promises of jobs as waitresses in Santa Cruz, only to confiscate their documents and force them into prostitution in "Las Casitas." Press reports describe "Yani" as the Madam who managed the brothels in "Las Casitas." Roque allegedly had several telephone conversations with "Yani," identifying himself only as "Mr. 5." The judge presiding over the case never questioned Roque and subsequently closed the case due to lack of evidence.

16. (SBU) When investigative journalism TV show "American Documentary" ("Documentos America") aired footage showing Mazzochi and Guerrero side-by-side recruiting women and children in the Buenos Aires city shantytown of Villa 31 to "work" in Santa Cruz, Governor Daniel Peralta ordered an administrative investigation into Mazzochi's alleged involvement in trafficking activities. Mazzochi and two other provincial police officers have been arrested, and the Governor has promised to suspend, investigate and fire any law enforcement officials in his province connected with these illegal activities. That said, post is unaware of any investigation into current Santa Cruz police chief Alejandro Martin or Marcelo Romero, Private Secretary to Santa Cruz province's Cabinet Chief, each suspected to be the man caught frequenting one of the brothels in hidden camera footage obtained by anti-trafficking NGO, La Alameda (ref A).

Judge Orders Raid and Closure of Las Casitas...  
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17. (C/NF) On June 7, substitute federal judge Ana Alvarez directed border patrol agents to raid "Las Casitas" and ordered the closure of the establishments. According to the press, this is the first time these establishments have been closed in 50 years. The judicial order came after local press publicized La Alameda's undercover investigation and subsequent judicial complaint denouncing drug and human trafficking activity in "Las Casitas" (ref A). La Alameda claims that these establishments were operating with licenses as night clubs or cabarets. The Border Patrol raided 29

brothels and arrested 200 persons, 120 of whom were deemed voluntary prostitutes by local authorities after being examined in a Rio Gallegos hospital. Although the Ministry of Justice's anti-TIP coordinator told poloff that no trafficking victims were found, La Alameda claims that the Santa Cruz government offered the trafficking victims very little protection or assistance, making it difficult for them to come forward and testify against their traffickers. In addition, La Alameda asserts that local police, who allegedly protect the brothels, were tipped off within hours after the judge ordered the raid, giving them plenty of time to warn brothel owners. Despite La Alameda's efforts, no TIP charges have been filed against anyone in the Las Casitas case.

...But Will It Last?

18. (SBU) Santa Cruz regional daily "Tiempo Sur" reports that the public is evenly divided over the closure of "Las Casitas." In an online poll conducted by the paper, only 46% supported the decision to close "Las Casitas", while 50% were against. Supporters of the raid argue that many women in these establishments are forced to work and that these places are havens for other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking. Opponents claim that the women "chose to work" in Las Casitas and that the red-light district made prostitution socially discreet and safe, a sentiment shared by Governor Peralta who has called the area "a part of the local culture." In fact, a small number of women who worked in "Las Casitas" have protested the forced closure demanding their jobs back.

19. (SBU) On July 3, Judge Alvarez allowed the owners of "Las Casitas" access to the establishments to secure their property after several locales were reportedly burglarized. Gustavo Vera told poloff on July 8 that the brothels remain closed. He explained that Judge Alvarez has kept the investigation into TIP activity open, but has recused herself from the prostitution aspect of the case, referring it to the provincial judicial system which has jurisdiction over prostitution cases. Vera claims, however, that the provincial judge assigned to the case send it back to Alvarez, arguing that the case should be handled by a federal court as it represented a case of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Comment

10. (C/NF) This is not the first time we have heard of a potential connection between human trafficking networks and individuals linked to Argentina's intelligence agency, SIDE. In 2007, an investigative journalist for Mexican television station Televisa told poloff that former SIDE agent Raul Martes was involved in trafficking Argentine women to Mexico. Post, however, has been unable to confirm that a Raul Martes ever worked for SIDE. Nevertheless, post will add the names of Roque, Guerrero, and Mazzochi to post's human rights vetting database.

11. (C/NF) Post is not in a position to determine whether any of the women working in "Las Casitas" were trafficking victims. This case illustrates some of the challenges in Argentine federal efforts to enforce anti-TIP legislation in the provinces. Although the promotion, facilitation, or exploitation of persons into prostitution is illegal in Argentina, and the law prohibits all locales that incite prostitution, judicial confusion over the legality of brothels remains. Judge Alvarez's decision to close Las Casitas appears to address this issue. This, however, has not stopped some provincial authorities, including Governor Peralta, from claiming that establishments such as the "Casitas" simply enable individual prostitutes to offer commercial sex voluntarily.

12. (SBU) This case also demonstrates the need to develop protocols to deliver psychological, medical, and legal assistance to potential trafficking victims to ensure their needs are met prior to interviewing them. As mentioned in

ref B, this is extremely challenging as Argentina's Criminal Procedural Code stipulates that law enforcement officials can only detain people for a maximum of ten hours without filing charges or a judicial order. In addition, law enforcement officers can only interrogate witnesses at crime scenes. After that, judges with jurisdiction over the case are in charge of summoning witnesses for questioning. Post and local implementing partner "Unidos por la Justicia" plan to address these procedural questions during a training workshop with federal judges and prosecutors in a workshop on TIP investigation methodologies in September.

KELLY